PRE-COLONIAL ICHI CONFLICT: FOCUS ON CRISIS DEVELOPMENT AND PEACEBUILDING STRATEGIES

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Abstract
Conflict has remained a regular manifestation in human societies across ages. It is generally stated that conflict emerges from the heart of men who engineers crisis in different ages. This study focuses on the Ichi people. It traces the historical origin of Ichi people as well as their geographical features. The study used primary and secondary data as source of data collection on the causes and impact of conflict in pre-colonial Ichi. The data collected from the randomly selected interviews were interpreted thematically. It should be noted that the study was hinged on human relations image of conflict and interactionist conflict ideology and the research found that the Ichi people fought with Nnewi neighbours in the pre-colonial era, over a parcel of land. It documents the process of preparation for war and impact analysis as well as the traditional road to peacebuilding among the pre-colonial Ichi people. Finally, the research recommends increased peaceful inter-group relations between the Ichi people and their neighbours.

Key Words: Conflict, deity, peace building, Nnewi & Ichi

Introduction

In different parts of Africa, communities and societies have fought at one time or another to maintain a given communal interest that was very dare for the survival of the people. At that time, armed conflict was perceived as a part for the survival of the shared interest, especially when confronted by hostile neighbours. While a number of people perceived armed conflict as an instrument for societal destruction, others perceived it as the continuation of inter-group relations. Inter-group relations at that time was driven by peaceful and violent factors that include inter-communal marriages, trade and economic exchanges as well as cultural exchanges, and armed confrontation of neighbouring communities.

The people of Ichi was no exception in the process of armed relations. The people of Ichi fought over almost everything they desired. This is because, power relations at that time was driven by the idea of might is right. There were lack of widespread geo-spatial institutions that managed the relations between one community and another, hence, for the Ichi people, who were traditional warriors; the ability to extend their sphere of influence through the manipulation of power was vital. Historically, the Ichi community has long being known as warriors that were hardly defeated in any battle they embarked on. The society trained their young men to be soldiers and brave. Their fighting force were mostly selected from the youths, especially those that were above twenty-five (25) years old (Akunne,2021; Nwokebi, 2021). These youths are trained using all means of informal education to acquire warfare skills that will enable them defend the Ichi community in the time of crisis.

Ichi is an autonomous community that is located at the Eastern part of the River Niger. The community is about 35km away from Onitsha, a metropolitan business hub of the Southeastern part of Nigeria. The community is located in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra state. Ichi is surrounded on the North by Nnewi, East by Oba in Idemmili Local Government Area and in the West by Oraifite. It should be noted that

the community is surrounded in the South by Ojoto that is also in Idemmili Local Government area.

Traditional Geopolitical and Economic Features

The topography of the town is purely hilly and the citizenry mainly settle and live in the valley, thus the problem of land for local cultivation has always been a regular occurrence. There are hills and attractive landscape namely Ugwu-obolo, Ugwu-obi and Ugwu Mmilimgbo- Ekulo. There are many valleys between the above named hills and at Oka Mbana -Ogbe village. Some of the traditional rivers in the community have dried up due to the changing effects of global warming and environmental change (Mojekwu, 1994).

Ichi is rich in untapped natural resources such as chalk and coal. The neighboring communities to Ichi often visited the communities to purchase chalk of diverse colours, which are found in large quantities within Ekulo. The basic occupation of the people is basket making, subsistence farming and commerce, with special focus on retail and wholesale trade. Very recently, there has been increment in small -scale and medium sized businesses as well as industries that currently springing up in different parts of the Ichi community thereby increasing the settlement pattern of the people. The people has popular market days that include Eke and Afor-Uzo. The market used to be the centre of business transaction during the precolonial era and has continuously developed since independence, especially during this era of think-home business development.

Ichi as a community practices traditional monarchical system of governance, which vests almost all the power of administration on the traditional ruler known as the Igwe. The title 'Igwe', as it is pertinent to note, was a relatively new creation because the ruler of Ichi used to be known as the 'Obi' of Ichi, being the direct descendant of the first son of Ichi. In the olden days, various villages had their own 'Obisi' who were of course subject to the Obi of Ichi. They handled the cases and dispute arising in their domain and those they

couldn't solve were referred to the Obi for adjudication. The Obi relied on the advice of the different Obisi as well as the good counsel of other titled men in the community in managing conflicts and peacebuilding. It should be noted that conflict was a regular issue that manifests in different forms in every human environment (Ani & Alegu, 2015). The Ichi people were not immune from conflict in their inter and intra-group relations from the pre-colonial era to present.

Methodology

This study was carried out in Ichi using qualitative methods of research. It primarily depended on oral sources from respondents in the process of data collection. The respondents were randomly selected and interviewed on the causes and impact of pre-colonial warfare in Ichi as well as the peacebuilding strategies that was applied by the people at that time. These respondents cut across different ages and gender as a way of ensuring that the account of different generations of Ichi men and women were captured in order to ensure balance and relative objectivity in the study. Their consent was received not to code their responses as key informant interviews but use their real names in presentation of the findings for academic purposes. Their responses were thematically gathered, analysed and documented as the findings of the study. A number of secondary sources were gathered in the development of the article.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict is inherent in every society that is inhabited by man. It is as old as man on earth. Conflict manifest due to opposing goals, principles, strategies, ideologies, identities etc. It is generally stated that conflict arises when there are irreconcilable interests/ goals amongst individuals, groups, actors, states etc. Conflict could exist only as negative peace or manifest at the psychological level, thereby causing strains and stress in the minds of man. It should be noted that conflicts start from the minds of men and grow according to the changing influence of *conflict drivers,* which are influenced by the *conflict situation, conflict actors* and *conflict environment*. Park and

Burgess (2011:574) argued that "conflict is designed to expose divergent dualism and achieve some kinds of disunity, even if, it is through the annihilation of one of the conflict parties". This study is rooted on the human relations image of conflict and interactionist conflict ideology.

Human Relations Image of Conflict: The apologists of this ideology see conflict as inevitable in all forms of human relations. For them, it is natural for men to engage in conflict. However, they maintain that how men manage their conflict situation could turn the nature of the conflict positively or negatively.

The Interactionist Conflict Ideology: They argue that conflict go beyond been inevitable as stated by human relations advocates but that harmonious, peaceful and cooperative relationships grow out of conflict experiences that were managed properly by those interacting with a transformative mindset.

In the pre-colonial Ichi society, there was no organized form of government that cuts across different communities that make up where we presently know today as Nigeria. Hence, in the event of any disagreement, conflict and armed confrontation becomes the easiest road to peace due to lack of institutions that have influence over the multiple sovereign and independent states, ethnic groups and communities that relates with each other at that time

Major Causes of Conflict in Pre-colonial Ichi

Conflicts in the pre-colonial times across Africa are driven by multiple factors. There are various reasons that drives people to fight across different African communities. In West Africa, various groups of ethnic groups, especially in Nigerian, often engage themselves in armed confrontations with their neighboring communities. These armed confrontations were fought for various reasons that include the quest for political prestige or strategic economic gain. In such armed conflicts, captives were forced to become domestic slaves or were sold out for economic profit. In other scenario, the warlike sons and daughters of the community are often hired by neighbouring communities as machinery to fight for them. Such people

were compensated with parcels of land which them and their descendants either sales or occupies. Again, Ichi communities also hire mercenaries that are often incorporated into their communities. These class of special warriors that were hired in the community are necessarily invited when the major interest of the society, especially, attack on the little available land in the community is imminent. When they exhibit brevity in the course of the armed conflict, they are often rewarded with parcel of land too and consequently became part of the society by enculturation. What that meant was that weak neigbouring communities always avoided physical confrontation with the people of Ichi.

In trying to write about the pre-colonial warfare of Ichi community, one must present the historical demographical, political and cultural setting of the people called Ichi (Ezenwa, 2021). Ichi is an autonomous community that had a great deity called Agbaja. Agbaja was believed to be a real ancestral son of the community and a direct son of the Eri from the Nri historical hegemony and Igbo ancestry (Madu, 2021). The people were said to have fought many wars in the quest of their migration to their present settlement across the Omambala River.

It was said that the Agbaja, the 7th generational son of Eri from the linage of warriors of those days were known for their strength in warfare and very good at craft of armed conflict. They were also good arts and craftsmen. Agbaja's descendants begot the Isu, Nnewi and Ichi from one mother and another mother begot Oraifite, all under Anaedo (Agu, 2021; Nnadi, 2021).

Furthermore, Ichi the direct son of Agbaja was said to have migrated from their former settlement at Nri down to Uke and Nnobi through the present Nnewi-Ichi to the present abode as their final settlement. And because of the inherited warlike posture and charism, they were able to assert their authority as the real owners of the land that they currently occupied in Ichi (Ujunwa, 2021; Okafor, 2021). As was the case then in those days, the first settlers becoming the owners of the land, Ichi through their brave and strategic

calculation that the environment with its mountain and valley will give them military security easily occupied the land effectively. Being bestowed with so much technicalities in the warfare expertise, it was said that they had very dangerous weapon of warfare that gave strategic victory in their armed confrontations (Agu, 2021; Okafor, 2021). This weapons were made on the specifications of the Ichi warriors by the blacksmiths. Furthermore, the people were involved in traditional religious practices which were noticeable in their quest for formidable army of those days. It was also stated that their deep believe in Chukwu, the Almighty God as well as the fidelity in offering libations to Him during warfare was a major source of victory.

Findings on Ichi Pre-colonial Armed Conflict

Conflicts are either intra-communal or inter-communal in nature (Olaleye, 2016) across many pre-colonial African societies. However, Salim (1997) maintains that despite the nature of their localizations, the conflicts challenge both national, regional and global security. In Nigeria, intra-ethnic, religious, militancy-driven, terror-driven and other forms of communal crisis are widespread (Albert, 2007). These forms of armed confrontations have been there across the ages. There existed armed confrontation between Ichi and various neighboring communities. These armed confrontations were driven and sustained by many factors already discussed in the earlier part of the study. The armed conflict between Ichi and Nnewi was said to have occurred according to oral tradition in the dime past before the coming of the white men. The major cause of the armed conflict was boundary and land dispute between both communities that had a history of land scarcity. The Ichi argued that the land was conquered by them but the Nnewi maintained that the land was traditionally their own. It was when the land was taken away from them by the Nnewi that armament started on both conflict divide. The contested area, which was formally known as Akaboichi was the boundary leading to Uruagu Nnewi. The armed conflict over the land created series of wars between Ichi and Nnewi after which Nnewi claimed the land and changed it's name to Akaboukwu which it is still bearing till today and remained part of Nnewi.

Ichi community had traditional altars which served as platform for the people's faith. These alters were guided faithfully against any form of desecration by the masses of Ichi community and outsiders (Okafor, 2021). One of the most essential traditional alter was the big altar, sometimes called idols by Christian with the traditional name Udogwu. Udogwu is located at Umunandu part of Ichi. The Udogwu traditional alter has high degree of sacredness and even the host village were highly respected and also avoided by other people due to the fear and reverence for the powers of Udogwu, which they regularly consult. Udogwu was a powerful Idol that was well known for fruitfulness, riches and fertility. Over the years, people testified that the idol gave fertility to their farm lands, and caused increased wealth, while giving protection and fruit of the womb. These and If any one dares to desecrate the altar, that person will surely be put to death. Resistance to this declaration results to outbreak of armed conflict irrespective of who was involved.

Other causes of armed conflict in pre-colonial era include marriages, human sacrifices, and some other forbidden cultures like slavery. Marriages which were mainly to bring together two communities, as well as peace and harmony among the people sometimes causes violent conflict when there is increased disagreement due to domestic violence and other forms of physical attack. A major form of marriage that drove conflict from pre-colonial era to present was usually between the marriage contract between the Diala (son of the soil) on one hand and the Osu (outcast) or the Ohu (slaves) on the other. Slavery as one of the factors that caused conflict in the pre-colonial era cannot be neglected. Slave trade in those days was a major source of income therefore the bigger the slaves that a man has, the higher the income he will generate from selling them. The greed to make desperate and quick money from slavery sometimes forces family members to sell the own people to the slave buyers, which sometimes leads to armed confrontation. Whereby a prince from the royal family decides to take a wife from an accursed village (enemy community) or where A well respected man decides to marry a slave girl. In such situation, conflict will arise.

The preparation and impact of armed conflict in Ichi has strong root on the African traditional warfare preparatory styles. The chief priest the custodian of Udogwu and all other priests under the Udogwu were the main people involved in recruitment and organization of the soldiers in the era of armed confrontation, especially against another community. The native doctors prepare drinks, herbs and charms for the warriors to prepare them for both invisibility, brevity and victory. They were often given the Otua-ofelu ability of disappearing as soon as one's enemy is about to kill the warrior. This craft of invisibility is deeply rooted in the African way of life and cosmology. There was also another act of preparation that the warriors underwent. They were given the Onyoo- ofu charm. The Onyoo_ ofu is the charm that have potent power to foresee the weak point and strong holds of the enemy. When the strengths and weaknesses of the enemies are investigated, the Ichi warriors will avoid falling prey to the area of their enemy's strength, while doing everything to attack from the point of weaknesses. There was also the Odu-una charm. The Odu -una has the ability to neutralize the enemy's charm during physical confrontation. It also weakens the charms that the enemy has planted in their own weapons.

Charms were implanted either by incisions of blade or sharp objects on the body or by mixing the charm in the blood of the warriors for them to drink. The chief priest administers the drinks/ charms and this they believe have the ability of intimidating their opponent on sighting them. The powerful influence of the charms could cause over-whelming victory and sometimes forces the enemies to surrender. Advanced level witchcraft /magical powers were equally manipulated as some warriors would sit on clay pot on top of the fire. Some normally wear armlet or cowries round their neck, waist or their wrist. Some will wear tortoise, which was believed to have potency against idolatrous fetish instrument. The youths, especially age grade groups, the younger ones from 20 to 40 year of age go to war in the event of armed confrontations from neighboring communities, whereas the older ones stay back and do the strategic planning.

It is noteworthy that before they go for war or any form of armed confrontation with an enemy community; all the warriors from different villages in Ichi will converge before Udogwu which is the central alter of the community for safe preparations. After the exercise, they will wash their head and face with water from Nwa Ngume River with some incantations before they set up for the war or armed conflict. Furthermore, they will then beat the gong and drums of war that informs the community of danger. At that point, a big cow is often sacrificed to the Udogwu before the warriors will take off. For sure, the precolonial people of Ichi believed in the combined powers of human preparation and influence of deity will give them resounding victory in any war.

However, the warfare between one Igbo community and another sometimes brings about peace and harmony amongst them. Conflicts lead them to the positivist perception of peaceful relations and they immediately follow the path of peace, thereby reconciling their differences and becoming friendly. Wars results to lose of lives and properties within the Ichi community and the affected conflict party, thereby making the loser community become slaves to the winner community. When the winning community takes over the geography of their neighbours, they are enslaved, while others become subjects, vassal settlements that pay tributes and royalties, etc. The population of the people was often greatly reduced during the period of armed confrontations. These pre-colonial arm confrontations often turn women to widows and children to fatherless orphans thereby making life difficult.

It is pertinent to note that wars during the pre-colonial period brought greater negative impact than the good it did for any community. It was generally believed that many Ichi men and women have lost their lives in armed conflicts. This of course became a great blow to them, as the unimaginable depopulation of people came about especially the ones that ran away for safety. It also affected the culture of food production amongst the masses as farmers were less disposed to go to their farms during armed crisis. Farms

were set ablaze, especially when the conflict manifests during the dry season. The implication was that the people's agricultural investments covering both food crops and cash crops, were often destroyed. Enemy communities try hard during the dry season to destroy everything that serves as the people's resources; thereby causing famine in such community.

Traditional Path to Peace
Babbie (2009) argued that when conflict is perceived through the lens of cultural values; responses tend to be non-rational and that was why Boulding (2002) came up with the idea of 'inner core' values, and unique epistemologies that shaped who we are, how we identify ourselves and how others have respond, which according to him are complicated by existential conflict. Scholars also agree that both traditional and modern missions promote peacebuilding (Albert, 2007; Noll, 2013).

In the African context, there has been a resurgence of interest in different forms of customary conflict resolution, which usually feature mediation or deliberation by elders as well as other customary authorities (Buur & Kyed, 2007). Studies have documented successful local conflict resolution processes based on customary mechanisms in the pastoral areas of the Horn of Africa (Chapman & Kagaha, 2009; Frank, 2002). Farah (1999) maintained that a voluntary, bottom-up approach is the explanation for successful peacebuilding in Somaliland. It should be noted that customary institutions sometimes fulfill a vacuum in geo-political areas where state institutions are weak like Somalia (Boege, 2006) and in remote regions of northern Kenya (Menkhaus, 2008). There these customary institutions champion the peace process of a society and because the customary institutions are led by local actors, they strategically design a process suited to the local context, which often respond much faster than state-led initiatives (Imobighe, 2003). The pre-colonial peacebuilding process in Ichi was driven by customary institutions and way of life.

It should be noted that the immediate objective of every conflict resolution is to mend the broken or damaged relationship, rectify wrongs, and restore justice that will ultimately lead to peace. Another aim is to ensure the full integration of conflict parties into their own societies again and to enhance the culture of cooperation. Traditional societies resolved conflicts that lead to wars through internal and external social controls and direct negotiations as well as traditional diplomacy. The internal social control processes of deterrence, where societies manipulated actions that promotes personal shame on individuals while re-enforcing fear of supernatural powers was largely used in peacebuilding within Ichi. External controls in Ichi traditional peacebuilding rely on sanctions associated with action taken by others in relation to behaviors that escalate conflicts within the community.

However, in Ichi, there are different categories of pre-colonial conflict resolutions such as the role of the ancestors. The ancestors have been conceived as the living dead that has the characteristics of sharing dual existence with the living world and the spiritual community across many African societies. It is generally believed that the experience they gained while on earth usually informed the level of their metaphysical reflections of earth activities while in the spiritual community. Such experiences lead to the motivation to intervene in influencing the art of conflicts resolution. The ancestors would bring to bear on their ancestral and serene community, the art of facilitating peace and harmony, which undoubtedly, one will find out resonated in the modular exhibition of peaceful development through direct influence in dreams, physical appearance in trance etc thus, the art of conflicts resolution would not have been limited to earthly living and sojourn but that it continued in the ancestral community. In communities like Ichi, people recognized the presence of their ancestors which they believed had strong ability in wadding-off evil, fighting for them as well as protecting them from their enemies. On each occasion; from festivals or ceremonies to quest for peace in Ichi, the activities of the day are not complete without the invitation of ancestors to come and join them.

The council of elders and family heads in Ichi had the capacity to initiate conflict resolution. They outline actions that will lead or sustain the society into a culture of peace and harmony. They act as the custodians of law and order, which often directly influences social and societal engineering. It is believed that knowledge and understanding as well as the perception of the elders are strong library for the promotion of conflict resolution. Elders in Ichi are thereby considered as the best people to resolve conflicts that existed within Ichi community and between Ichi and other communities. Apart from this group, there are also the local chiefs, who seek the welfare of all the individual in the community. They are the people to lay complaint to the traditional ruler, Igwe and his cabinet and sometimes even suggests multiple paths to peace that the traditional ruler should consider. There were also certain cultural organizations that settle dispute and impose sanctions which must be obeyed respectfully within Ichi like the council of chiefs. The chairman of Ichi council of chiefs acts in his capacity as the head of the king's palace court called Uno-ikpe (Court) and the Igwe has the veto power, which he can exercise to over-rule any decision or judgement passed by the lower courts after due consultation with the elders of his Obi' known as Ndi- 'Oka - Ikpe (judges). In some cases, the judicial responsibilities are shifted to the age groups, secret societies and cultural organization in Ichi for consideration and settlement. The decisions reached by them were strictly respected and accepted.

Secret societies also helps in the culture of peace. In as much as they were used in armed confrontations against the enemy communities, they also join to resolve greater percentage conflicts that might result to wars and to restore peace among the people. This is because sometimes the physical strength of council of elders, age grade, is not enough to resolve conflicts especially those armed conflicts that are caused by the abuse of traditional believes and centre of faith like attacks on revered deity. Some elements of powers and authorities beyond the ordinary were needed to consult with the ancestor and the supreme forces in determining the processes of atonement that would

bring peace to the community. Therefore, secret societies perform a great role in resolving conflicts in Ichi.

Oracles were also major actors in the pre-colonial conflict resolution process. Most people at that time took their problems to the oracles in search of divine impartial wisdom of the gods as well as their intervention in ensuring societal peace. The oracles are extra human forces usually represented are accessed through carved wood, stone or iron, trees and hills located in revered places. Oracles in Ichi were believed to possess supernatural powers, hence they played important roles in bringing resolutions to wars and conflicts while dispensing justice among the people. The Udogwu was one of the oracles most Ichi people go to in the quest to restore peace and order in the community. In cases like marriage crisis between one family and another, people consults the Udogwu for speedy resolution. The people seek for justice and would sometimes go for vengeance where they are not satisfied with the results they got. Oracles are however consulted in this case to give them permission to go armed confrontation and to assure them of victory. Communities seeking for peace also go to visit the oracle to convince their enemies on the need to settle their differences for the sake of peace. The coming of Christianity and influence of western education has undermined the role of oracles in peacebuilding within Ichi. This is because Christian and educational influence tends to criticize and even cause physical damage on the oracles (Ayandele 1977; Ukeje, 1969).

Conclusion
The pre-colonial wars were mostly a model of communication as a way to warn enemy communities never to challenge a group again. This study revealed that in most pre-colonial wars that the Ichi community went to, they were hardly defeated except war with the Nnewi people. It traced the causes of armed conflict in precolonial Ichi and revealed that these conflict had multiple implications for the society. It should be noted that wars are sometimes said to be a source of peace, but people were unlikely to engage

in wars for the sake of peace. This is because end point of wars has a great negative impact and it takes lot of efforts to restore peace and harmony, especially when the cost of the war was counted. To heal the wounds that war has caused is almost impossible. Even during the pre-colonial era, people go to war against a perceived enemy without knowing their degree of armed preparation and if they are unlucky and were not equipped with higher or more sophisticated weapons of warfare, they will be greatly defeated. Pre-colonial colonial warfare could be said to be a tough one.

Generally, wars are not good path to push peace. The impacts of the pre-colonial warfare in Ichi community has affected them so much that those people living in the river line areas and depend on the rivers for fish farming are disappointed because during these wars the enemy community look out on the people's resources and income earning in other to destroy it. They destroy the rivers through oil spillage causing the fishes to die and ensuring increased hunger. Finally, the study documents traditional paths to peace and conflict resolutions between Ichi and other communities or within the Ichi community. It revealed that conflict resolution process institutions and processes include the council of elders, secret societies, shrine/ oracles, ancestors and other external powers who join forces to ensure increased peace in the community.

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